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Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, DC 20554

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Federal Communications Commission
Office of the Secretary

In the Matter of)
)
Lifeline and Link-Up) WC Docket No. 03-109
)

REPLY COMMENTS OF COX COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

Cox Communications, Inc. ("Cox"), by its attorney, hereby submits its reply comments in the above-referenced proceeding. In the proceeding, the Commission has asked interested parties to comment on a limited number of issues. These reply comments focus on the issues relating to ensuring that eligible consumers are enrolled in Lifeline and Link-Up.¹ As described below, Cox submits that the best way to ensure that eligible consumers obtain Lifeline/Link-Up support is not to mandate particular advertising or other outreach methods by carriers, but to follow the lead of the states that have adopted automatic enrollment programs, including Nebraska, where Cox has had a positive experience.

I. Introduction

Cox is the leading competitive provider of facilities-based local telephone service in the United States, with more than 2.2 million residential lines and more than 180,000 business customers in service. Cox now offers telephone service in all thirty-five of its systems in eighteen states across the country. Cox is authorized as an eligible telecommunications carrier ("ETC") in five states and therefore has extensive experience with the Lifeline/Link-Up program.

¹ Cox takes no position on the other issues in the proceeding.

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Cox's experience has led it to several conclusions about the most effective ways to ensure that eligible consumers actually enroll in Lifeline/Link-Up. As described below, the single best way to achieve this goal is to make enrollment automatic whenever possible, based on a consumer's enrollment in other government assistance programs. Other outreach mechanisms, however, should not be adopted on a uniform national basis because the communities that individual carriers serve vary too widely to make such mandates efficient.

II. Automatic Enrollment Is the Most Efficient Way to Bring Eligible Consumers into the Lifeline/Link-Up Program.

The key goal of any outreach plan must be to adopt mechanisms that effectively identify consumers who are eligible for support and actually bring them into the Lifeline/Link-Up program. Increasing awareness without getting eligible consumers into the program is, effectively, merely an academic exercise. For that reason, any Commission action should focus on mechanisms that have been shown to increase enrollment. There is no better mechanism for that purpose than automatic enrollment.

Cox has experience with automatic enrollment in Nebraska, and the program in that state is simple and effective. Cox receives a spreadsheet on a regular basis that lists both individuals who are eligible for Lifeline/Link-Up on the basis of their participation in specific assistance programs and individuals who no longer participate in those programs. Eligibility is monitored by the Nebraska Public Service Commission to maintain the accuracy of the list. Cox customers who appear on the list of eligible individuals are provided with Lifeline/Link-Up assistance. While Cox makes information on its participation in Lifeline/Link-Up available in various ways, including providing materials to the agencies that administer other public assistance programs, it

gets the vast majority of its Lifeline/Link-Up customers through automatic enrollment. Cox does not have to seek out these customers and, more importantly, these customers do not have to take any special or additional steps to be enrolled in the program. As a consequence, the automatic enrollment program is efficient for both Cox and eligible consumers and the number of eligible consumers who participate is greatly increased.²

The Cox experience is consistent with the results reported by the New Jersey Public Advocate in its initial comments. The Public Advocate noted that enrollment in Lifeline/Link-Up more than doubled in a single year after automatic enrollment was implemented.³ This increase demonstrates how well automatic enrollment programs target and identify eligible consumers. It is difficult to imagine a more efficient or cost-effective approach to ensuring that consumers who are entitled to Lifeline/Link-Up support receive that support.

III. Uniform National Outreach Requirements Are Not Likely to Be Cost-Effective.

Several commenters argue that the Commission should adopt a series of specific outreach requirements for ETCs, ranging from providing materials in Spanish to offering specific links on ETC web sites.⁴ While Cox has and will continue to engage in outreach to potential Lifeline/Link-Up customers, there are good reasons not to mandate any particular approach.

The most important reason not to adopt a specific mandate is that carriers serve widely-varying markets. This means that one-size-fits-all outreach mandates are certain

² As noted by several parties in discussing other issues, there are many consumers who are eligible for Lifeline/Link-Up who do not participate, so the success of automatic enrollment in increasing participation is significant. *See Comments of the National Consumer Law Center at 2.*

³ Comments of New Jersey Public Advocate at 6-7.

⁴ *See, e.g., Comments of National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates at 12-16.*

to misdirect efforts in many parts of the country. For instance, Cox's footprint includes markets with significant Spanish-speaking populations, like San Diego and Phoenix, and markets where there is essentially nobody who speaks Spanish as a primary language, like its Idaho system. Similarly, in some markets it may be appropriate to target advertising to public transportation systems that often are used by low-income consumers, while in other markets there may not be significant usage of buses or other forms of public transportation. Indeed, as NTCA describes, there are many rural markets where traditional advertising would be an unnecessary expense, and community bulletin boards and word of mouth would be better ways to provide information on Lifeline/Link-Up.⁵

The diversity of markets and of the many target populations for Lifeline/Link-Up assistance makes it unlikely that any program that mandated specific mechanisms for reaching those populations would be very effective. Requiring Cox to provide Spanish-language brochures in Idaho or requiring rural carriers to buy advertising would not reach any significant portion of the eligible population and would divert resources from other mechanisms that would be more tightly targeted.⁶ There is no reason to require such expenditures, particularly in the absence of any evidence that they will lead to a meaningful increase in participation.

⁵ Comments of the National Telephone Cooperative Association at 2; *see also* Comments of United States Telecom Association ("USTA Comments") at 4 (discussing efficacy of newspaper advertising). Consistent with NTCA's observations, Cox notes that, in discussions with USAC personnel, it has been told that in some cases the most effective way to reach eligible consumers is through information provided at retail outlets like thrift stores that are frequently visited by low income individuals.

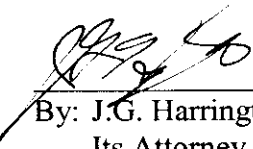
⁶ Moreover, any additional obligation to advertise or market Lifeline/Link-Up will impose additional costs on carriers that participate in the program. Thus, to the extent that the Commission adopts any mandates for such outreach, carriers should be entitled to reimbursement from the universal service fund for the amounts they expend to comply with those mandates. *See, e.g.*, USTA Comments at 5. Such reimbursement is appropriate because otherwise carriers will be forced to divert resources from their other marketing efforts, many of which already reach potential Lifeline/Link-Up customers.

IV. Conclusion

As shown above, the most effective tool the Commission can adopt to maximize participation in Lifeline/Link-Up is automatic enrollment, which will be far more effective than any advertising or marketing mandate. For that reason, Cox urges the Commission to require automatic enrollment and not to adopt any advertising or marketing requirements in this proceeding.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I, Vicki Lynne Lyttle, a legal secretary at Dow Lohnes PLLC, do hereby certify that on this 10th day of September, 2007, copies of the foregoing Reply Comments of Cox Communications, Inc. were served by via hand delivery to the following:

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